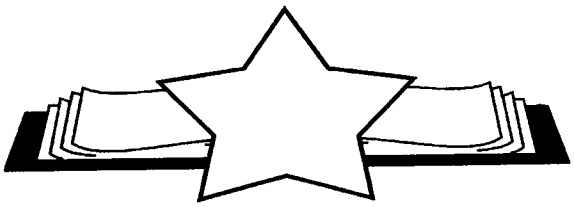
Code # 07
(office use only)

NEW JERSEY

2001-2002

Guidelines and Application

STAR



SCHOOLS

Deadline for Application to County Office:
DECEMBER 14, 2001

The Star School application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page

County	Bergen
District (Proper Name)	River Dell Regional School District
Address	Street P. O. Box: 55 Pyle Street City: Oradell, New Jersey Zip Code: 07649
Telephone: 201-599-7206	Fax: 201-261-3809 Email: desil@riverdell.k12.nj.us
Chief School Administrator	Dr. Lillian A. De Simon
Nominated School (Proper Name)	River Dell Middle School
Address	Street/P. O. Box: 230 Woodland Avenue City: River Edge, New Jersey Zip Code: 07661
Telephone: 201-599-7250 Ext.310	Fax: 201-599-7297 Email: luker@riverdell.k12.nj.us
Principal	Richard Lukesh
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	Lillian A. De Simon

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ✓ Yes ___ No **County Superintendent's Signature** Aaron R. Graham

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Code # _____
(for office use only)

NEW JERSEY
STAR SCHOOLS
2001-2002 APPLICATION

RESPONSES to the information below and the statements must be ANONYMOUS. No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school or the community. Use the words "the school" in referring to the applicant in the responses to the statements.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:

Type of School	**Grade Levels**	**School Enrollment** 495
____ Elementary School	_____	
_x_ Middle School	7-8	**Name of the School's Specialization**
____ Junior High School	_____	Technology Integration
____ High School	_____	_____
____ Other: _____	_____	_____

Location:
____ Urban/city; ____ Suburban with urban characteristics; _x_ Suburban; ____ Small City/Town; _____ Rural

Previous Star School: Yes __ No_x If Yes, Year(s) _____

KEYBOARDED RESPONSES to the statements below must be **no more than a total of five pages. Keyboard the statement followed by the response.**

1. Describe the school's specialization and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,** that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.

2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization.

3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.

4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization ? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the *Core Curriculum Content Standards?* Provide student performance data for at least the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. Use state tests and, if available, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.

5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.

6. **Previous Star School Winners Only**: Provide a one-page addendum to your application that describes efforts to expand or replicate the specialization within the school and/or the district. Have there been dissemination activities beyond the school or district? If so, please elaborate.

*The May 1996 edition of the ***Core Curriculum Content Standards*** published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's website at http://www.state.nj.us/education.

1. Describe the school's specialization and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,* that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.

Our middle school specializes in infusing technology into a general education curriculum. The community showed its support of these efforts through a referendum it passed in the early 1990s. Since then, the school has reinvented its courses in technology and related arts programs to support the integration of technology in every classroom.

The middle school technology program is a state-recognized leader for having introduced technology into a well-established industrial arts program. This represents an ongoing commitment to provide equitable access to technology, to improve delivery of instruction, and to enable students to become lifelong learners. In this context, technology includes, but is not limited to, desktop computers and a local area network that is integrated with the mass communications system whenever feasible. These advances enhance the school's ability to communicate, process information, and improve student and faculty productivity.

Technology provides both a medium and a tool, enabling the middle school staff to present an interdisciplinary curriculum. Viewed neither as an add-on nor as a separate entity, technology is rather considered an integral part of the curriculum and of information management in the middle school.

Examples of the school's specialization in technology are numerous, including:

Computer classes. These are required of all middle school students—seventh-and eighth-graders alike. Class sizes are minimized to allow each student to work on a single desktop computer. Students are exposed to a variety of technological concepts, including operating systems, computer hardware, word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentation software, Internet research skills, hypertext markup language, and creation of animated graphics.

Technology classes. The mission of "Design and Problem Solving" is to acquaint seventh-grade technology students with the scientific process of problem solving. Students design structures using only specified parameters. Projects include building bridges out of popsicle sticks to support a given weight; building skeletal towers to hold a cup of water and withstand a wind storm; designing a sandal of geometric shapes that will support the student's own weight (and that of the heaviest faculty member); and using recycled materials to create a toy with at least two moving parts.

"Tech for Success," the eighth-grade technology class, provides the systems approach of input, process, and output to technology. Lessons include the use of gears and motors to activate cars operating under different types of motion; building and programming traffic lights and carnival rides; and designing a car that will travel up an inclined plane at the slowest possible rate. (The record is four an a half days.)

Home Economics. This subject incorporates technology in an amazing number of ways. The sewing segment of the course becomes a unit lesson on homelessness, beginning with research via the Internet on the facts, statistics, and conditions of homelessness in the United States, as well as efforts to alleviate it; use of a virtual game, "Hobson's Choice," through which students experience the uncontrollable events that can lead to homelessness; the search for or creation of songs and poems about homelessness; and the creation of quilted sleeping bags for homeless people. Each student is photographed with a digital camera holding the square he or she made; the photos are e-mailed to the students' parents with letters about the unit. At the conclusion of the project, the quilts are hand-delivered to homeless persons on the streets of New York City. Parents' reactions to the e-mail communication and the project have been gratifying.

Music. Classes explore the issue of sharing files on the Internet—focusing on the recent "Napster" controversy of downloading music for free despite the moral and ethical implications of copyright law. Students undertake research via the Internet regarding copyright law, royalties, performing rights groups (such as ASCAP and BMI), music-sharing Web sites, the legal and moral issues of electronic theft, and the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Art. Students use their home computers to further explore the topics introduced in class—learning more about the artist whose work they are studying, or seeking examples of cubism, surrealism, expressionism, or pop art. In class, the teacher uses technology to illustrate various objects or images. Students in turn are asked to creatively replicate these objects on the Internet.

World Languages. Thanks to technological advances, our community is expanding rapidly. World language teachers create computer-based projects throughout the year, such as researching the well-known monuments and museums of other countries. Students produce multimedia projects.

Mathematics. The students see the benefits of using spreadsheets become clear, from creating accurate charts to writing functions. Among the many activities is a Thanksgiving Day project, in which students plan a Thanksgiving menu, create a timeline for the holiday, and calculate the costs of their meal. All research regarding process and goods is conducted by Internet search.

Science. Dominating the curriculum are multimedia presentations that the students prepare to demonstrate their knowledge of various topics, such as the solar system and endangered species. During their Internet research, it is not unusual to see a student downloading the latest pictures of Mars from NASA's Web site, or visiting the National Oceanographic Association to search for information on the endangered horseshoe crab.

English. Students can be seen furiously word-processing their English assignments on any given day—as their teachers require of all written assignments. Word processing allows the student to fully enjoy the process of writing, editing, and rewriting. Before they write their assigned book reports, students are expected to research the author, as well as the region and era in which the story took place.

Social studies. Students supplement their textbook reading by finding new information on given topics on the Internet, including foreign countries and ancient civilizations. In the process, they are enticed to examine and evaluate other points of view.

These are just a few examples of the many ways in which our teachers implement technology in the classroom. The school district strives to implement the Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards as frequently as possible. The areas of the Cross Content Workplace Readiness Standards that the school meets include: 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.12; 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10; 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11; 5.4. We view technology as a powerful link between content areas. As one of our seventh graders announced during the presentation of one of his class' several projects, "At our school, technology is like DNA. It combines all the other subjects." It is true! Our community's commitment to technology is really a commitment to continuous training to use it intelligently in support of an endless variety of combinations of standards and indicators for Visual Arts (1:1-6); Literacy (3:1-5); Mathematics (4:1-12); Science (5:1-12); Social Studies (6:1-9); and World Languages (7:1-23).

2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization.

Professional development activities. In computer skills, the faculty of the middle school is quite competent. A staff survey was conducted using the teaching skill levels as defined by the New Jersey Department of Education 2001 School Technology Survey. According to the results, no teachers in the school were beginners, 68% were intermediate, 22% were advanced, and 10% performed at the instructor level.

This is not to say that the faculty members are satisfied with their current knowledge. In a staff survey conducted by the district's Professional Staff Development committee, 75% of the respondents named the area of technology as their first choice for in-service training. To meet this desire, the school district has invited faculty members who are experts in technology to conduct in-service workshops. These include

word processing, spreadsheets, databases, multimedia presentation software, paint programs, Internet research, Web page design, computerized grade books, computerized attendance and record keeping, use of scanners, use of digital cameras, PC troubleshooting and maintenance, use of graphing calculators, and use of online library resources. Every staff member, including secretarial staff, has participated in several of these workshops.

In any given year, staff members participate in other staff development activities outside the area of technology. Some of the workshops and conferences faculty members have attended are Beginning and Advanced Training for Mentors and Novice Teachers; Inclusion Strategies and Differentiated Instruction for Regular and Special Education Teachers; Brain-Based Learning; Young Adult Literature and the Classroom Library; and The Artist Teacher Institute.

Faculty research. The school's faculty members strive to be the best in their field, as evidenced by the number of teachers who have earned their master's degrees: in 1998, 72% of the faculty had achieved a master's degree in one of various fields. By continuing to attend school, the faculty expects to be exposed to the latest educational methodologies and to new technology. In addition to taking traditional university level courses, numerous staff members attend conferences sponsored by their professional organizations, including the NCTM, NCTE, NST, and, of course, the National Middle School Association (NMSA).

Exemplary teaching methods and link to specialization. Students are constantly challenged by their teachers to rely on technology throughout their learning, such as submitting work that has been word-processed. Throughout the school day, teachers from every area of the curriculum can be seen showing multimedia presentations on a 27″ presentation station, visiting the school's three computer labs, and using the e-mail system to communicate with parents.

3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.

The administrators share the belief that the school should serve every child, in all of his or her needs. Although we present a rigorous academic and extracurricular program, the administration and faculty place "teaching the child" well before "teaching the subject." Perhaps no one better represents our belief in child-centered education than our Principal, who oversaw the transition from a junior high school to a modern and efficient middle school.

It is the Principal who convinces our Board of Education that a solid middle school education cannot be conveyed by good wishes alone—but only through a dedicated investment in ongoing staff development and research into the middle school child. Our Principal is to be credited for having implemented site-based management long before the NJDOE mandate for local professional development committees.

Our staff, in consultation with community members, has engaged in assessing students' needs. Under the administration's supervision and guidance, staff members made recommendations and assisted in completing the budgets to implement them. Although staffs in the middle school and the high school are supervised by department directors, every faculty member participates in building the budget for his/her subject area, according to team and content area needs.

Mindful of the core curriculum content standards, administrators review with supervisors and teachers all district initiatives, including our school objectives; our commitment to character education; and particularly our definitive use of technology as a tool for teaching, learning, and communication. Our budgets are always reflective of our mission.

In the same way, the staff is called on to make important decisions regarding curriculum. This has required us all to work harder and longer, but the reward has been *ownership.* Being an integral part of our school and its future is a constant source of excitement. Nothing in our undergraduate or graduate

education prepared us for the expectations that our Principal has inspired us to meet. As one teacher recently observed, "Whew, what a challenge ownership is!"

We see the same site-based energy at work in our mentorship program—which the administration supports by providing for the continuing training of mentors and by implementing mentors' suggestions for professional staff development. Teachers actively screen and interview prospective mentors and observe their demonstration lessons before they are accepted into the program.

The faculty has grown through the vision of the Principal, who respects our individual leadership styles and helps us use them in a complementary fashion (just as we do our students' learning styles in their many cooperative learning efforts). The schedule and team structure accommodate unlimited sorts of projects on which teachers collaborate in a friendly, supportive atmosphere. One of our middle school scholars spoke for teachers, parents, and community members alike when he announced during a graduation assembly: "This must be like building the space program—we all have a hand in it. I will always come back to visit."

4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization? How are you ensuring that the content you are ensuring is consistent with the Core Curriculum Content Standards? Provide student performance data for at least the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. Use state tests and, if available, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.

The focus of the courses in the technology area (specifically, "Design and Problem Solving" and "Tech for Success") emphasizes the problem-solving process. Students in these courses not only follow the scientific process, but document their work using a word processor and computer drawings. One of the goals of the program is to bring mathematics and science skills together. The success of the program can be measured, in part, by the results of the GEPA test over the past two years—specifically, the percentage of increase in the Advanced Proficient and Proficient Levels on the test's mathematics section. In 1998-1999, 90.5% of the students scored at the Level I/II proficiency; these scores increased to 92.2% in 1999-2000 and to 92.6% in 2000-2001. In all three years, approximately 40 students scored at the Advanced Proficient Level.

The increases are even more dramatic among our Special Education students. In 1998-1999, 13.6% of the students achieved at the Proficient Level, increasing to 26.1% in 1999-2000 and to 28.1% in 2000-2001—an improvement of more than 100% over two years.

In addition, the eighth-grade Computer Literacy class administered a Technology Proficiency Assessment test, with a pre-test in October 2000 and a post-test version in June 2001. Both tests had two distinct parts. An objective part consisting of 60 multiple-choice questions addressed spreadsheets, computer vocabulary, operating systems, Internet knowledge and research, and hypertext markup language. A hands-on practical section consisted of five tasks: two tasks on file management, one on word processing, one on Internet research, and one on spreadsheets.

The post-test showed improvement in all areas, with a 6% improvement on spreadsheets and a 24.3% increase in HTML. Improvements in several areas of the hands-on test included 5.7% in file skills and 1.9% in Internet research skills.

After evaluation of these test results, recommendations were made and implemented to further enhance the Computer Literacy classes as well as all content areas.

5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, schools districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.

The Principal and the faculty meet frequently to review the implementation of our school's mission statement. As the Principal feels, any visitor—even a stranger—should be able to read the statement and not have to ask, "Where does this or that indicator take place?" That visitor should be able to see it throughout the school. The school's philosophy is enacted in every classroom, lab, and hallway. We live our mission.

Firmly committed to meeting the children's innumerable emotional and learning needs, the Principal calls upon the community of stakeholders (professional and lay, adult and child) to support continuous, effecting faculty training. Several mechanisms are relied upon to identify and articulate staff development needs in relation to the students' learning needs: a curriculum council, a professional development task force, an advisory council, a principal's monthly coffee hour for parents, and the school PTO.

Parent-teacher conferences, held each November, provide time for parents and teachers to discuss the children's academic and social progress. When warranted, meetings between parents, team teachers, guidance counselors, and the child study team are scheduled; then a plan can be formulated to encourage greater progress in the child's studies.

Community involvement can be seen from the moment a visitor enters the school. Parent volunteers and PTO members are involved daily in creating bulletin boards, distributing announcements, and attending to general school needs. Community groups often present informative assemblies to the students, such as one on Japanese culture last year. At our annual eighth-grade awards assembly, community organizations present awards, gift certificates, and plaques. On many occasions, high school student groups give special presentations such as G.U.T.S. ("Growing Up Taking a Stand") to teach refusal skills and other social behaviors.

Recently, our middle school won a grant worth several thousands of dollars from Arts Horizons, Inc. This will provide this year's seventh-graders with an artist-in-residence, who will train the seventh-grade team teachers in drama, movement, and playwriting, in addition to conducting a 10-day workshop for the students.

During this time students, divided into "tribes" will learn peaceful co-existence by teaching each other's tribe their own different cultural values, through ritual dance, theater, and poetry. "How to Build a City", while a response to the fateful September 11, is also an annual theme given our school's mission of promoting the active pursuit of peace among the many ethnic and religious groups to which our school is host—and for whom it is a family!

It is our middle school's goal to make of each student a lifelong learner, and we believe that technology is integral to reaching that goal. The faculty is proud to help every student strive to be the best, to learn the most, and to live life as an active participant.